

REVIEW: MERCURY 260 TDI V6 DIESEL INBOARD

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The new Mercury Diesel 260 TDI V6 inboard shows compact diesels are now a solid proposition for trailerable boats.

Marine industry giant Mercury Marine has enthusiastically embraced Volkswagen's recent compact diesel research in producing its new range of Mercury TDI diesel inboards. So I jumped at the invitation to test a 3.0L 260hp V6, fitted to a Kiwi-built Rayglass 2350 Hard Top on a fairly wet and blustery day at Melbourne's National Water Sports Centre.

MERCURY TDI DIESEL



The Mercury 260 TDI V6 with a Bravo 3 leg was just what I'd been wishing for. And yep, I got that right – it's marketed as a Mercury Diesel, not a MerCruiser. Finally, a diesel with the noise levels of a petrol inboard, exceptionally light weight, premium levels of safety, and power to burn.

We fired up the Rayglass and they set me free to have a proper play. My commercial boat background always endears me to diesel engines but I've rarely been completely satisfied with previous attempts from most brands. They've always left me wanting more in some way; either through a lack of performance, unacceptable induction noise, or that deep-down-diesel-throb that often becomes amplified in small trailerable craft.

ENGINE PERFORMANCE



Turn the key and the engine idles with a confident murmur until you plant the throttles. There's only a microsecond of delay before the power begins to impress. I was pleased with the performance within five seconds of planting the throttle – this is a diesel with real difference.

The acceleration is endless right through the rev range, with a number of noticeable power bands thrusting this little beauty

right up to Wide Open Throttle – an impressive 38kts at 4170rpm. That's a whisker over 70kmh or nearly 44mph for old fellas like me. In any language, it's more than enough top end for any offshore boat of this nature. The engine delivers maximum torque between 2000-2800rpm giving enormous confidence throughout the real working range.

The other impressive part was the fuel consumption. At 38kts the unit topped out at 54L/h, and a quick check of my records revealed that a roughly equivalent sized boat with a competitor's 250hp four-stroke outboard used 61.5L/h at 35kts and 80L/h at 40kts (Cruise Craft 685 Hard Top with Yamaha 250hp V6).



Fuel figures at lower revs were almost comparable between the two configurations, and brand is of little consequence. In other words, if you are sensible and run either craft at practical and comfortable speeds then fuel usage will be similar. However, if you want to get out there, or get home fast, you will enjoy the huge top end speed/fuel savings with the Mercury diesel – not to mention the torque, safety and longevity.

It is also interesting to note that I found better consumption figures in practice than quoted on the Mercury spec sheet. My testing was done with two passengers and approximately 180L of fuel. We later loaded her up with five people on board and found very little difference in performance – testament to the tremendous torque of this diesel. The weight of the unit is also a very pleasant surprise. At a low 306kg, the 260hp Mercury TDI V6 diesel is considerably lighter than the popular MerCruiser 4.3L petrol V6 that weighs in at 352kg and pushes out lesser horsepower (230hp) with lower torque.

HANDLING AND RIDE

Now when it comes to noise levels I'd rather talk about my experience than quote figures. The Mercury specifications tell us it achieves 70dB, which sounds very low but doesn't define the parameters or testing conditions that resulted in this figure.



What does matter to me, is that the Mercury diesel has a really satisfying note for a compact diesel. It has very little induction whistle, and a sweet turbo pitch singing away softly, yet assuredly. There's no deep down throb or nasty harmonic.



We took the big girl through her paces in a series of steep high speed turns and the big Bravo 3 Duo prop leg with 4/3 blade, 22in stainless props never slipped an inch. It just bit through turns, responded very well to trim and transmitted power efficiently on fast take offs. The engine revs barely dropped as we laid her over through the steep banking turns, and you could power yourself off your feet with the high-speed acceleration.

To say I was pleased is a massive understatement, and we did it all without a hint of diesel fumes, even with a strong tail wind blowing directly into the hard top.

THE VERDICT

Mercury TDI diesels are available in V6 and V8 models from 230hp to 370hp, and there's also the QSD range of in-line four and six-cylinder configurations from 115hp to 350hp.

They all come standard with Smart Craft instruments, and in our case, it was optioned with a Vessel View seven-inch digital display which I found very easy to read in all light conditions, and simple to navigate through its multitude of functions, including more than 30 live engine parameters.

You can option up again to the Digital Throttle and Shift (DTS) and even Axius joystick piloting, or maybe Axius Premier, for full interaction with autopilot, waypoint sequencing or you can stay in one place (maybe on top of that bait school or bommie) with Skyhook digital anchoring.

The Mercury team certainly taught this old dog some new tricks with their efficient, innovative and user-friendly TDI compact diesel technology.

HIGHS

- Quiet – nice engine note
- Effortless direct power through the range
- Fuel efficient
- No diesel smell or fume
- Compact
- Lightweight

LOWS

- Microsecond of delay from standing start

MERCURY 260 TDI PERFORMANCE

Two passengers + 180lt fuel

11.4kts 15.6L/h @ 2000rpm	
19kts 22.8L/h @ 2500rpm	Sweet travelling speed with huge range – good speed for managing big sea conditions
25.4kts 30L/h @ 3010rpm	Loves to get up and boogie, with real push around 2800rpm
32kts 39.5L/h @ 3500rpm	Noticeably low noise levels and hi-tech acoustics, she loves to travel at this speed
38kts 54L/h @ 4170rpm	She trims up and gets a further turbo kick through to WOT

Five passengers + 180lt fuel

18.3kts 23L/h @ 2570rpm	Very little change in performance with added weight
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SUPPLIED BY

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